

“Opening Address”
by the Head of St Mark’s College, Adelaide,
Professor Don Markwell,
at the College Commencement Service,
St Peter’s Cathedral, Adelaide,
Friday 28 February 2020

This service marks the commencement of a new academic year for the students and staff of St Mark’s College, and the conclusion – or the near-conclusion – of the Welcome Week with which we have sought to prepare our new and returning students for the year ahead of living and learning together.

We are very grateful to the Archbishop and to the Dean of the Cathedral, to parents and other relatives and friends, Old Collegians, Board members, and friends of the College for your presence and for your support at this landmark on our journey.

Thank you for your support for our students at the start of this academic year, and thank you all for your support to me at my formal commissioning as Head of College.

Just a minute or two ago, before God and this congregation, I made a declaration – a promise - in almost exactly the same form that has been made by at least my last two predecessors, John Bannon and Rose Alwyn – and perhaps by others before them.¹

Like them, I said that I – and I quote -

“promise to uphold the purposes for which the College was founded, as a place of learning and faith, in which the finest qualities are nurtured in a community of scholars; to hold in trust the rich inheritance received from those who have gone before, and to hand it on yet more excellently to those who come after, and to exercise my authority ... justly, so that all who live and work and study here may flourish and excel.”

These beautiful and powerful words sum up so much that is important for the College. As anyone who has read the history of the College or the life of our founding Master, Sir Archibald Grenfell Price, knows well, St Mark’s truly was founded as a place of learning and faith in which the finest qualities would be nurtured in a community of scholars.

The role of leaders in this community is, in my view, precisely to do what my predecessors and I have promised to do – to uphold those founding purposes. It is to give the best effect we can in our time to the great ideals and values for which the College was founded. Circumstances change, but our purposes and our values endure.

Above all, our purpose is to give all our students the greatest all-round educational experience we can in a college environment that offers academic support, broader intellectual stimulus, pastoral care, and rich opportunities for engagement in sport, cultural activities, community

¹ It is likely that the wording of this declaration was borrowed in 2000 for the commissioning of John Bannon as Master from the wording used in 1997 for the commissioning of the Warden of Trinity College, University of Melbourne.

service, spiritual reflection, and a social life together. It is to be a residential academic community where all who live and work and study here may indeed flourish and excel.

In the words of the declaration which I have made, we – all of us in the St Mark's community - do hold in trust a rich inheritance which we have received from those who have gone before. I will do all I can to hand it on yet more excellently to those who come after – and I hope that every member of this College, grateful for the opportunities it gives them and recognising how much they owe to the generosity and labour of those who have come before us, will all do everything we can to hand on this College even better to those who come after us.

Part of our rich inheritance is reflected in the strong links between the College and this Cathedral. Last Friday morning, our new students and many of our student leaders visited this Cathedral and were given a fascinating tour of it – for which all are very grateful, as we all are for the Cathedral and the Dean making us so welcome again today. I know from my own experience how welcome students and friends of the College will be if they come to any of the many weekly services here at the Cathedral.

The links between the College and the Cathedral go back to the founding of the College. This September, as the first step towards our celebration in 2025 of the centenary of the College's founding in 1925, we will mark the centenary of the first resolution in the Anglican synod – in September 1920 – to begin the process of founding a university college here in Adelaide.

One physical manifestation of the links between the College and the Cathedral – which you may have noticed before – is that above the inner doors at the main entrance to the Cathedral are small stained glass windows installed as a memorial tribute to Charles Allan Seymour Hawker, MA, MHR – Master of Arts, Member of the House of Representatives. If you look up a little as you leave the Cathedral today, you will see these windows just above these inner doors.

Charles Hawker was one of the members of the committee that in the first half of the 1920s planned the founding of the College. He was the largest single donor to the fund that enabled the purchase of Downer House in 1924 and the creation of the College's first tennis court, and served as a member of the College Council from 1925 until his death.

Charles Hawker's name is remembered at St Mark's in Hawker House – purchase of which was made possible by a generous gift from his sister, Lilius Needham – and Hawker annexe, and with a noble portrait, generously donated by his nephew, which hangs in the ballroom in Downer House. And we are delighted each year to welcome Hawker Scholars to St Mark's.

Born on a homestead in the mid-north of South Australia in 1894, Charles Hawker studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was seriously and repeatedly injured in the First World War. Returning to South Australia after the war, he was successful both as a pastoralist and as a member of Federal Parliament and for a time the federal Cabinet, before being killed in a plane crash, the crash of the Kyeema, in the Dandenongs in October 1938. Many people believed that, had he not died in that plane crash, he would have become Prime Minister of Australia instead of, or before, Sir Robert Menzies.

Charles Hawker's close friend, the first Master of the College, Archie Grenfell Price, spoke at his memorial service in this Cathedral five days after his death, saying that – and I quote – “there is no one to whom St Mark's should pay a more affectionate and grateful tribute” as “one of the earliest, ablest, and staunchest of supporters” of the College.

Like Archie, who had studied at Magdalen College, Oxford, Charles Hawker, having studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, was committed to enabling students here in Adelaide to have the same benefits of collegiate education that they had had in the older colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. Both deeply committed Christians, Archie Grenfell Price and Charles Hawker, along with our other founders, wanted this Anglican foundation – the College of St Mark - to be imbued with Christian faith.

At his memorial service, Archie spoke of what he called Hawker's "life of splendid sacrifice and service", and went on:

"Many qualities lifted him above ordinary men, but chief of all, his mental and physical courage, his absolute sincerity, his kindliness and his desire to serve shone out. A scholar and a gentleman, his qualities were recognised both by his political opponents and friends. He brought to every economic or social question a trained academic mind of great critical brilliance, and his speeches were based on such careful research and such world-wide travel that they invariably attracted the closest attention from all parties in the Federal [Parliament]."

This tribute to Charles Hawker seems to me to capture much of what we at St Mark's stand for – excellence in intellect, character, leadership, and service. These are the same qualities, I might add, which are sought in the Rhodes Scholarships, with whose values ours so closely align.

Charles Hawker and Archie Grenfell Price, himself a public figure of some significance in South Australia and nationally, including briefly as a Member of Parliament himself, both embodied a quality which Archie acknowledged in Hawker: the application of a trained academic mind to ideals of service to the wider community. There are innumerable ways to do this; but in both their cases, it included their responding energetically and courageously to great and difficult public issues of their day in war and in peace.

The powerful combination of the trained academic mind and ideals of service is reflected in the College prayer that we will pray soon, when we ask God to "give to all who study here a true love of knowledge ... so that we may be equipped for service."

It is reflected in the blessing with which the Archbishop will conclude this service, as many College services have concluded in the past: "Seek knowledge, strive for wisdom, be of service to others."

This combination – the trained academic mind and ideals of service – has been reflected in many ways through the history of the College. It is exemplified in the two members of St Mark's who have gone on to be Premier of South Australia – Don Dunstan and John Bannon. It is exemplified in the current Australian of the Year, Dr James Muecke AM, who has used his medical expertise to become a pioneer in blindness prevention, including through the charity Sight for All. And it is reflected in so many other members of this College who – to use those words yet again – have married their trained academic minds to ideals of service, using their abilities and their expertise to make a difference for good in the world in the circumstances of their day.

Many of our current students are doing this today, including through using their skills for such causes as promoting Indigenous education, preventing sexual misconduct through education on respectful relationships, and protecting the environment, for example through minimising

the use of plastic and promoting the use of biodegradable plates, cups, and cutlery. This activism and enthusiasm give great hope for the future, not only of the College, but of the wider communities in which our students will go on to serve.

Our College students' Charitable Foundation is keen to expand the involvement of students in giving of their time and skills in community service activities, to which I hope all our students will contribute. One of our student leaders said to me this week that she considered that those who have the privilege of academic study have an obligation to use their talents and skills to help others, which she clearly works hard to do – and intends to do more.

As we commence a new academic year at St Mark's, and our students begin or resume their university studies in less than 72 hours' time, let us commit ourselves afresh to the great ideals for which the College was founded and for which it exists, and let us all consider how we too may – now and over the decades ahead – devote our trained academic minds to ideals of service, making a difference for good in the circumstances of our day.

We should aspire to no less, and the world needs no less.